

HERTSMERE BOROUGH

**PROPOSED ALTERATIONS TO THE CHIMNEYS AND MAIN SCHOOL
BUILDING AT FALCONER ROAD, FALCONER SCHOOL, BUSHEY.**

Report of the Director of Environment

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Local Member:- M Colne

1. Purpose of Report

To consider planning application ref. 0/0169-03 for alterations to the Chimneys and the main school building at Falconer School, Falconer Road, Bushey.

2. Summary

2.1 Falconer School is a 60-place school for secondary age boys who have emotional behavioural difficulties. A total of 59 pupils attend the school, 6 of who are term-time weekly boarders. The school is located within the Green Belt and a Conservation Area in Bushey. Access to the site is from Falconer Road. Bushey Hall School adjoins the site to the west.

2.2 The school is based in a former sanatorium, which was once part of the Junior Masonic School in Bushey. The accommodation was not designed for its current use as a school and inadequacies were highlighted in both the 1997 and 2001 Ofsted inspections. The application proposes to undertake minor alterations to the main school building and extensive internal adaptation and refurbishment to the Chimneys building. The plans are to convert the larger rooms in the Chimneys for use as specialist teaching areas, and to adapt the remaining areas for use as residential boarding to replace the existing boarding facilities.

2.3 The proposal would involve the construction of a temporary contractors' access and compound, which would be located to the north of the existing access on Falconers Road.

2.4 Hertsmere Borough Council has no objection to the application. The County Council as Highways Authority has no objection. 13 objections have been received from local residents raising a number of issues including loss of a parking space, objections to the proposed temporary access, and inappropriate development within the Green Belt. One

letter of support has been received from a local resident who states that a proper redevelopment of the school would be good for the area. The Local Member raises no objection to the development of the site but objects to the construction of a temporary access.

- 2.5 The main issues in the determination of the application are Green Belt Policy, proposed construction of a temporary access and visual impact of the development within a Conservation Area.

3. Conclusion

The report concludes that the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission subject to conditions including approval of a landscaping scheme prior to the commencement of development (to include tree replacement), design of the temporary contractors' access and compound (and restoring the land on completion), hours of delivery and construction working, marking out of the temporary contractors' compound, and the duration of the temporary access.

1. Description of the site and proposed development

- 1.1 Falconer School is a 60-place school for secondary age boys who have emotional behavioural difficulties. The school is located within the Green Belt and a Conservation Area in Bushey. Access to the site is from Falconer Road to the east. Bushey Hall School adjoins the site to the west. To the north lie playing fields and a disused swimming pool, which is owned by Bushey Hall School.
- 1.2 A total of 59 pupils attend the school, 6 of which are term-time weekly boarders. There is a total of 47 full and part-time staff of which 4 full-time staff work in the evening/night in the residential unit.
- 1.3 The school is based in a former sanatorium, which was once part of the Junior Masonic School in Bushey. The accommodation was not designed for its current use as a school and inadequacies were highlighted in both the 1997 and 2001 Ofsted inspections. Five out of ten classrooms were below recommended sizes. The school also lacks appropriate curriculum facilities for PE, CDT, Food Technology, Science, Music and Art.
- 1.4 The residential accommodation provided for six weekly boarding pupils is currently located in the existing schoolhouse. However it is unlikely that the current accommodation will meet new care standards which came into force in April 2002.
- 1.5 The Chimneys building is located about 15 metres to the north of the main school building. The planning application seeks to undertake minor external alterations to the main school building and extensive internal adaptation and refurbishment to the Chimneys building. The Chimneys building was previously used for several years by Aldwyck Housing Association, however this presented a number of serious issues in relation to child protection and security. The building has been vacant since April 2000 and has been subjected to a high level of vandalism, and is therefore currently boarded up.
- 1.6 The plans are to convert the larger rooms in the Chimneys for use as specialist teaching areas with associated facilities. This would include provision for Art, Technology and Home Economics rooms. The remaining areas would be adapted for residential boarding use to replace the existing boarding facilities. External alterations to the buildings would include new paved areas and paths, new fire exits and associated ramps, and new planting. All window, door and brickwork alterations would be constructed to match the existing. All brickwork would be red-brown, doors would be black painted timber, and windows would be of black painted/powder coated steel.
- 1.7 The existing palisade fencing which currently surrounds the Chimneys building would be removed allowing both the main school building and the Chimneys building to occupy the same site.

- 1.8 The proposal would involve the construction of a temporary contractors' access and compound. The new temporary access would be located on Falconer Road to the north of the existing school access, and a new temporary pavement crossing would be constructed. The temporary access would be constructed where a lay-by currently exists resulting in the loss of one on-street car parking space. The contractors' compound would be located within the site boundary on the grassed area which lies in front of the main school building. It is anticipated that the temporary access would be required for approximately 15 months.
- 1.9 The proposal would necessitate the removal of seven trees. A landscaping scheme has yet to be submitted, however, this would be required through condition should permission be granted. The landscaping scheme would need to provide details of replacement tree planting and details of how the contractors' compound would be restored following completion of the project.

2. Consultations

- 2.1 Hertsmere Borough Council has no objection in principle to the scheme.
- 2.2 The County Council as Highways Authority does not wish to restrict the grant of planning permission.
- 2.3 The Local Member raises no objection to the development of the site, however objects to the construction of a temporary access.
- 2.4 Transco confirm that the company has plant in the vicinity which may be affected by this proposal.
- 2.5 A total of 24 properties were consulted on the application, with 13 letters objecting to the application and 1 letter of support being received. The main issues of concern can be summarised as:
- objecting to the creation of a temporary access due to increased vehicle movements, noise, dust, loss of a parking space;
 - work is not appropriate for the Green Belt;

3. Planning Considerations

3.1 The application site lies within the Green Belt and a Conservation Area as defined on the proposals map of the district plan.

3.2 The relevant development plan policies are:

- County Structure Plan – policies 1 (Sustainable Development), 5 (Green Belt), 13 (Education and Training);

- Hertsmere Borough Local Plan (adopted 1991) – policies 2 (Metropolitan Green Belt), 49 (Educational facilities), 55 (Conservation Area), 65 (Open Land Area).

- Hertsmere Borough Local Plan (post inquiry modifications version 2000) – policies C1 (Green Belt), C3 (Reuse of Buildings in the Green Belt), C15 (Development Criteria), E20 (Conservation Areas – Retention of Character), S5 (Extension to Existing Schools or Colleges).

3.3 The principal issues to be taken into account in determining this application are: -

- development within the Green Belt and Conservation Area;
- construction of a temporary access.

3.4 Green Belt and Conservation Area

School buildings, even on an existing school site, are not included within the categories of development regarded as appropriate within the Green Belt. Such development is not acceptable unless any other harm to the Green Belt is outweighed by other considerations.

3.5 The development does not propose the construction of any new buildings, but for the re-use of the existing buildings on site. The external alterations to the buildings would be new ramps and pathways, changes to the windows and doors for fire safety, and the construction of new accesses. The applicant has stated that new and replacement doors and windows would match the existing, doors would be black painted timber, whilst windows would be black painted/powder coated steel. Given the minimal alterations to the exterior of the building it is considered that the proposal would not affect issues of acknowledged importance within the Green Belt. It should be noted that if the application site was not within a Conservation Area much of the work would be classed as permitted development. The scheme is considered sensitive to the character and the nature of the existing buildings and would preserve the character of the Conservation Area. Given the current disused and run-down condition of the existing Chimneys building it is considered that the development would enhance the area and would as such amount to an appropriate development

within the Green Belt. Green Belt policy encourages re-use of buildings of architectural merit and this would apply in this instance.

3.6 Construction of a temporary access

The proposal would involve the construction of a temporary contractors' access and adjoining compound, which would be located to the north of the existing school access on Falconer Road. It is anticipated that the temporary contractors' access would be required for approximately 15 months.

3.7 Local residents and the Local Member have objected to the construction of a temporary access due to increased traffic, noise, dust and the loss of a single parking space.

3.8 The applicants have explored alternative locations for the contractors' access with the headteachers of both Falconer School and Bushey Hall School. As Falconer School is a school for boys with emotional behavioural difficulties, any disruption to the pupils surroundings could influence their behaviour, therefore particular care is needed to be given to managing any building work.

3.9 Both local residents and the Local Member wish to see the contractors' access to the school via the currently unoccupied swimming pool to the north of the school site, or across the fields from The Avenue, a road which runs to the west from the northern end of Falconer Road.

3.10 The applicants have investigated these options and have provided a supporting statement which states that the option of using the existing access into the disused swimming pool has been considered. The use of this access would not be possible on two counts:

- This site is owned by Bushey Hall School who are currently in the process of selling the site. Bushey Hall School states the site is highly likely to be sold during the period of the proposed works at Falconer School, and are anxious to ensure that the sale of the swimming pool site is not compromised and as such are reluctant to enter into any formal agreement to enable this access arrangement even for a temporary period.

- The swimming pool car park is currently used by Bushey Hall School as an area for school buses to drop-off/pick-up school pupils. The segregation of pupils from the contractors' work force would be problematic and would present an unacceptable level of risk. Should contractors use this car park for access/compound they would have to travel through Falconer School's playground/car park to access the main school building, which would be unacceptable on health and safety grounds. This also has to be linked to the problems experienced on a short-term contract to install fencing when conflicts occurred between contractors and children from Bushey Hall School.

- 3.11 Access across fields from The Avenue to the school site would not be feasible due to the high cost of providing a temporary road, including lighting, over a long distance. As with the swimming pool access, contractors would need to travel through the school playground to gain access to the main school building. The land between The Avenue and Falconer School is owned by Comer Homes who have offered the land to Hertsmere Borough Council for use as open space.
- 3.12 The option of using the existing school access would increase the congestion already occurring in this area. The existing school has very limited hard play space and this is extensively used. Contractors' vehicles would need to travel through this hard play area and as the school have no other recreation area available the movement of construction vehicles would be unacceptable on health and safety grounds as well as general amenity of the pupils attending the school.
- 3.13 The current proposal to create a temporary access on Falconer Road, to the north of the existing school access, is considered to be the safest and the only practicable one of the options considered. The temporary access would allow contractors to bring all vehicles connected to the works off the highway and into the compound. All construction materials would be stored in this area. The temporary access would ensure separation between pupils and contractors, therefore minimising the risk of accidents and disruption to the school day. The contractors would be able to access both buildings from this location. Due to the nature of the work, which is refurbishment, internal alteration and limited external works, it is not anticipated that heavy plant and vehicles would be used.
- 3.14 Whilst it is acknowledged that a parking space, situated in a lay-by on Falconer Road, would be lost for a temporary period to allow the construction of a temporary access, it is not considered that this would greatly affect the parking situation in the area as the majority of the dwellings on the east side of Falconer Road have off-road parking facilities. The County Council as Highways Authority has not objected to the proposal and believe, given the alternative options, that the need for access outweighs the argument made against such an access.
- 3.15 Details of the design of the temporary access have yet to be submitted and this would need to be agreed by the Highways Authority prior to the commencement of work. There is also a need for a limitation on material delivery times to ensure that these do not take place during the period of half an hour either side of the official start and end of the school day. The temporary access should not be retained on a permanent basis. These matters can be secured by condition.
- 3.16 Landscape
The proposal involves the removal of seven trees from the site. A tree survey has been submitted which states that there are no trees of any great value affected by the proposals and the numbers lost can be matched by replacement planting of a greater value to the school. A

condition requiring a landscaping scheme to be submitted to include details of species and locations for replacement tree planting should be imposed if planning permission is granted.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 This application relates to necessary educational development on an existing school site. There would be no additional encroachment into the Green Belt and issues of acknowledged importance would not be affected. The proposed scheme is sensitive to its location within a Conservation Area and, given the current disused and run-down condition of the Chimneys building, it is considered that the development would enhance the area and as such is considered appropriate development within the Green Belt.
- 4.2 There is concern from local residents that a new temporary access would create additional traffic, noise, dust and general disruption in the area and whilst it is acknowledged that there will be some disruption this will be for a temporary period and with suitable conditions can be kept to the minimum. The applicants have demonstrated that this is the most suitable location for the access and the County Council as Highway Authority has not objected to its location due to its temporary nature therefore it is considered acceptable in this instance. A condition on any planning permission granted would ensure that the access would not be retained on a permanent basis.
- 4.3 The report concludes that the Director of Environment should be authorised to grant planning permission subject to conditions including approval of a landscaping scheme prior to the commencement of development (to include tree replacement), design of the temporary contractors' access and compound (and restoring the land on completion), hours of delivery and construction working, marking out of the temporary contractors' compound, and the duration of the temporary access.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 There are none for this committee.

Background information used by the author in compiling this report

Planning application reference 0/0169-03

Consultation responses and representations received in response to planning application ref. 0/0169-03

Hertfordshire County Structure Plan Review 1991-2011

Hertsmere Local Plan, adopted 1991

Hertsmere Local Plan (Post Inquiry Modifications Version 2000)